

Making Room at the Table

Reflections and stories of how people impact our lives

Artwork by **Abby Alexis**



*Created in your likeness, I mirror your image;
I am a child of the light.*

THE BEATITUDES OF posABILITY

"Blessed are you...

who take time to listen to difficult speech
for you help me to know that
if I persevere I can be understood.

Blessed are you...

who never bid me to "hurry up" or take my tasks
and do them for me
for often, I need time rather than help

Blessed are you...

who stand beside me as I enter new and untried ventures
for my failures will be outweighed by the times
I surprise myself and you.

Blessed are you...

who ask for my help
for my greatest need is to be needed

Blessed are you...

who understand that, sometimes,
it is difficult for me to put my thoughts into words

Blessed are you...

who with a smile encourage me to try once more

Blessed are you...

who never remind me that today
I asked the same question twice

Blessed are you...

who RESPECT ME
and LOVE ME "JUST AS I AM",
and not as you wish I were."

Worship Resources

Temple Talk

John 9: 19 “Is this your son who was born blind? How does he now see?” His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was blind: but we do not know how it is that it is that he now sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him, he is of age. He will speak FOR HIMSELF. His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus, to be the Messiah, Would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, He is of age, ask him.”

Today, many people with any kind of disability are assumed to be mentally retarded. As a young child it was OK for someone to ask: “What’s wrong with him?” When I got older “of Age” people still addressed their questions about me to other people, as if I was not in the room to speak for myself.

What’s wrong with him? I had a boss who introduced me to a judge who I would be working with. The judge asked my boss if I drove a car. My boss replied, “O my God no!” Was I chopped liver”

I walked into medical clinic, while my wife went into a store. The clinic did not wait on me until my wife c came back in, because they said, “We do not talk to retards.”..

Ask us! We may have a disability, but who in this church does not have a disability? Stand up now! Ask Me!

Temple Talk written by *George Bowden*

Personal Stories

1. I was born with Cerebral Palsy. I was never able to write legibly. All my life as I needed to communicate, God provided the means to do so. In Jr. High I learned to use a manual typewriter. In college I had an eclectic typewriter, and when I started to work, we had electronic typewriters, Dictaphones, and computers. At every stage of my life, God provided for my need to write.
2. Because I could (can) not sing, I was asked to say the prayer for an event. I am still composing prayers for worship, and have had devotions published in Christ in Our Home.
3. One time in downtown Baltimore at 7:30 AM, while walking with three women that I rode the bus with, a homeless woman grabbed my cane and threatened to hit a pregnant woman in the stomach with it. She then ran toward the harbor. A homeless man, who I had befriended, who heard the commotion, ran up from the subway, chased the woman and retrieved my cane.
4. Another time I held the door open for a lady with a baby stroller, 5-10 other people rushed in while I was still holding the door, turned around and yelled: "F... Retard."
5. Some 20 year old men on the bus stop said I was the prototype for the bobble head. It was not funny at the time, but later I could laugh about it.
6. I received a standing ovation at a synod assembly after giving a testimony about my life and faith.
7. I was bullied in college. Sometimes I was lifted into a tall waste can, and watched trying to get out.
8. An eighty year old lady asked me what my parents did that God made me such a cripple. I should have said "I shoot old ladies."
9. One nasty professor in college saw me carrying a heavy typewriter from his class in 90 degree weather, jingled his car keys, and said to have a nice day. He also told all the men in his class that he would flunk them because they belonged in Viet Nam, and not in college.

George Bowden

Devotions and Prayers

Written by George Bowden for the daily reflection resource, "Christ in the Home."

Thursday December 1, 2011

Isaiah 40: 1-11

Here is your God

"Get up to a high mountain...Say to the cities of Judah, 'Here is your God.'"

During the exile, God's People could seldom feel God's presence. They sometimes felt that God had deserted them. In the passage, God is sending a message of comfort and hope to his people, this message included the forgiveness of sin, and the assurance that God was with them.

This is the message of Advent. Although this was spoken to the Jewish people, returning from exile, it was also spoken years later by John the Baptist, as he prepared the way for Jesus Christ. When God comes into our lives, He comes to level the highway. The hills and valleys and other rough places of our lives become smooth. The sin we commit is forgiven. We are made whole, which allows us to see God, and to know that we are in his presence. As we approach Christmas let stand on a high mountain and announce to the world, "Here is your God."

Prayer: Prepare us to stand on a high mountain to proclaim your love and forgiveness in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer Concern: People looking for God.

Friday December 2, 2011

Psalm 85: 1-3, 8-13

Restoration of a Broken Relationship

“Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky.”
(v.11)

The title given to the 85th psalm is: “Prayer for the Restoration of God’s Favor.” The first two verses show that God had been faithful to his people in the past. “You forgave the iniquity of your people; you pardoned all their sin.”

Verses 3-7 (not in the text) indicate that the people had again sinned and were not in God’s favor. Their relationship with God had been broken. The writer is, once again, asking that the people’s broken relationship with God be restored.

Beginning again at verse eight, the people are told of God’s promises of steadfast love, faithfulness, righteousness and peace. The word “faithfulness” is being used both in terms of God’s faithfulness, and the people’s (our) faithfulness to God.

How are broken relations handled in our lives? Broken relationships with other people put a strain on our relationship with God. As we mend our human relationships, we become more faithful to the life that God would have us live.

Prayer: Come to us, Lord Jesus, in faithfulness and righteousness. Bring us your steadfast love, so we can intern show love to the world. Amen.

Prayer Concern: People needing healing from broken relationships

Saturday December 3, 2011

2 Peter 3:8-15a

Wait Patiently for the Coming of the Lord

“While you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish, and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.” (v. 14-15a)

Sometimes I wish that we did not have fax machines, email, or cell phones. Although these things can be a big help in our lives, they also make us treat everything as an emergency. We have lost the ability to wait patiently for what we desire.

On the other hand we can be very slow at asking for, or granting, forgiveness; or repenting of our sin. These are the very behaviors that matter most to God. Our God is a patient God. A day

in God's sight is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like one day. What matters most in our lives takes a long time. A child will take many years to become a mature adult. A Christian spends a lifetime studying God's Word, and growing in their faith. Sometimes we wait until we retire to do something that we find very meaningful. "Regard the patience our Lord as salvation." Christ wants all people to come to him. He has no desire for anyone to perish, but for all to come to repentance. Therefore, he waits very patiently for all people.

Prayer: Help us to be patiently as we await your coming. Amen.

Prayer concern: People who have no patience

Sunday December 4, 2011

Mark 1:1-8

The Second Sunday of Advent

"The one, who is more powerful than I, is coming after me: I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals."

John the Baptist seemed to know the identity of Jesus before Jesus began his public ministry. John was a humble man, but he preached the need for repentance. He baptized people (with water) for the forgiveness of their sin. He recognized that Jesus would institute a new kind of baptism, that is. Baptism of the Holy Spirit that would lead to eternal life.

Some people thought that John was the Messiah. John knew that his role was to prepare the way for the Messiah. This fulfilled the prophecy from Isaiah. He also knew that people needed to repent and to be clean in order to understand and accept Jesus. Luke 1:44 tells us that as soon as Mary greeted her relative, Elizabeth, the baby in her womb (John) leaped for joy, that the Messiah would soon be born. We can all learn from John's humility. We are called on to proclaim that Jesus is the Messiah, to our world. We, like John, are not worthy. It is because of our baptism that we can boldly tell others the good news of Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Create in us clean hearts so that we can make known your love to the world. Amen.

Prayer concern: Those who feel unworthy

Monday December 5, 2011

Isaiah 26:7-15

One True God

“O Lord our God, other lords besides you have ruled over us, but we acknowledge your name alone.” (v.13)

Throughout biblical history God’s people have at times felt separated from God. These separations may have been because of the exile, crises in faith, or their own sinful nature. At these times it easy to think that other gods had control over their lives. Even when people felt separated from God, God was never separated from them. In today’s reading, Jerusalem has been restored, and is seen as a level path for the righteous. The people are again praising God, and saying that all that they had done, God had done for them.

Who are some of the other gods who rule our lives? As we prepare for another Christmas, there seems to a million things to do: shopping, cleaning, cooking, etc. one could allow these things rule or control their lives. Other distractions, like drugs or alcohol abuse, can rule a person’s life.

We do acknowledge that many times we let other things rule in our lives, but the one true God calls us back to a righteous path where we can know His presences.

Prayer: O God, help us to focus on you, and acknowledge that you are our one true God. Amen.

Prayer concern: People too busy for God

Tuesday December 6, 2011

Isaiah 4:2-6

Cleansed by God

“On that day the branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and glory of the survivors of Israel.” (v.2)

Advent is a time of cleansing and preparing for the coming of Christ. The Old Testament is a history of man turning from God, and God restoring man to a right relationship with him. Jerusalem was a city, and probably had some of the same difficulties that plague our cities today. The Lord will wash away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleanse the bloodstains of Jerusalem. Notice that he does not talk about destroying people, but rather talks about washing and cleansing them.

When people are washed and cleansed by God, they become a Holy People. Our cities still have filth and bloodstains. Baltimore, where I live, has a very high murder rate. Because of communication we can see almost instantly the pain that is inflicted because of the brokenness of our relationships with each other and with God. When God heals these broken relationships, he provides “a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain”

Prayer: Cleanse us and prepare us to accept your good gift of Christ in our lives. Amen.

Prayer Concern: Those who do not know the love of Christ

Wednesday December 7, 2011

Malachi 2:10-3-1

Being Faithful

“So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless.”(v16)

God has formed covenants with his people throughout history. A covenant is an agreement between two or more parties. Part of God’s covenant with Judah was that the men would marry within their own religion. The men in Judah broke that covenant by marrying the daughters of foreign gods.

The reason the God wanted men to marry within their religion was so that they would have Godly offspring. Judah’s unfaithfulness was not only marrying foreigners, but they were unfaithful to their wives. Then they did not understand why their offerings were not accepted.

It is common today for people to marry outside of their faith. This may affect the ability to raise children in a particular faith. God has always wanted humans to remain in a covenantal relationship with Him. That is why he offers grace and forgiveness. God’s ultimate gift is to reconcile man to himself, in his son Jesus Christ. He wants all people to repent of their unfaithfulness. The New Covenant is the Body and Blood of Christ, given for us.

Prayer: Find us faithful, gracious God, not only to you, but also to your children. Amen.

Prayer concern: Husbands and wives who are unfaithful to each other

Thursday December 8, 2011

Isaiah 61: 1-4, 8-11

Blessing and Responsibility

“The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me.” (v.1)

As I read Isaiah 61, I feel joy, excitement, blessed, and a sense of responsibility. This is a prophecy of Jesus Christ, but it also gave hope to the people living in the time of Isaiah. God has

promised to take all the negative things in life: including oppression, broken hearts, imprisonment, and turn them into the positive things like: good news, healing, liberty, and freedom. As the Jewish people returned from the exile, they experienced the rebuilding of their nation. As it says in verse 9, "Their descendants shall be known among the nations....They are a people whom the Lord has blessed."

When Christ came he brought about the new covenant which was for all people. The Jewish people were blessed to be a blessing to the nations. Now, we can read these words as a personal blessing and as a call to responsibility.

He has anointed me to proclaim the good news, to heal and to comfort, etc. God promises are here. Christ has fulfilled this prophecy. "God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all nations." (v. 11)

Prayer: Anoint us O Lord to share the good news of Jesus Christ with the world. Amen.

Prayer Concern: People who take responsibility for sharing the good news.

Friday December 9, 2011

Psalm 126

Joy in the Lord

"Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy."

From the very beginning God has intended for his children to be happy. Adam and Eve were living in a beautiful garden, with everything they wanted. Then sin came into the picture, and mankind had to work for his wellbeing. Life became very difficult, as men began to fight with each other. There were many times when the People of God were unhappy, and life was a struggle. The exile was such a time.

Psalm 126 is titled "A Harvest of Joy." "The Lord restored the fortunes of Zion." This was cause for celebration and thanksgiving. Dreams of a better life returned, and tears and sorrow were turned into Joy. This was harvest and a homecoming, and people were overjoyed to see the results of their labors. Advent is a season of expectation of Jesus' coming to bring joy to the world – life can be very hard sometimes. There is sorrow and pain, and disappointment. Christ himself knew all hardships of life, even experience a brutal death on a cross. But joy followed in the Resurrection

"The Lord did great things for them, and he continues to do great things for us, and we rejoice."

Prayer: Fill our hearts with joy and laughter. Amen.

Prayer Concern: Those who have no joy in their life

Saturday December 10, 2011

1 Thessalonians 5: 16-24

The Importance of Prayer

“Pray without ceasing.” (v. 17)

If I were teaching a class on what a life of prayer should look like, I would show the movie “Fiddler on the Roof.” Tevye, a Jewish peasant from Russia, is trying hard to follow his traditions, which are being challenged by his daughters. Tevye talks to God all the time about everything. He does this in a very human way, “God can’t. You make me a little bit rich”? Even as Tevye’s traditions change, he understands God’s answers to his prayer.

How do we talk to God? As a Luther Leaguer, I did participate in some all-night prayer vigils, but I am not one to pray all night about a particular item, but rather to pray, or talk to God, whenever I feel the need. I don’t think we should hound God. “Give thanks in all circumstances.”

Prayer is a lifestyle. Recognizing God in a sunrise – is a prayer. Thanking God for safety on the road, or asking for His help is a prayer. May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound. We are sacred to God. We can bring anything to God in our prayers.

Prayer: Lord, be with me as I talk with you about the joys and sorrows in my life today. Amen.
Prayer concern: People who have never talked with God.

Sunday December 11, 2011

John 1:6-8, 16-24

The Third Sunday of Advent

“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.” (v.6)

God choose many prophets in the Old Testament whose words described the coming of Jesus Christ. John the Baptist was the last of the prophets. John lived his whole life in the wilderness, and the people came out from the city to hear his message. His message was very positive. He was preaching about the forgiveness of sin. The Jews sent priest and Levites to ask John who he was. They thought the he was either the Messiah, or Elijah, or a prophet. John’s answered, “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘make straight the way of the Lord.

With all the turmoil of city life, it is good to go into a wilderness, or a quiet place, where we can focus on God and his will for our lives. I seldom use the word “awesome.” However, when I saw the Canadian Rockies, awesome was the only word that I could use to describe my feeling that I was in God’s presence. This must have been how the people felt when they heard John Proclaiming Jesus’ coming.

Prayer: Give us a quiet place to prepare to welcome Jesus into our lives. Amen.

Prayer Concern: Those who need a wilderness experience to feel God’s Love.

Monday December 12, 2011

1 Kings 18: 1-18

A Faithful Servant

“So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him: and Ahab went to meet Elijah.” (v.16)

The name Obadiah means “servant of the Lord.” Obadiah was in charge of King Ahab’s palace, in Samaria. Ahab and his wife Jezebel were worshipers of the gods of Baal. Obadiah remained faithful to the God of Israel, and when Jezebel was killing off the prophets of the Lord, Obadiah hid one hundred of them, and provided them with food and water.

There was a great famine in Samaria. Ahab and Obadiah went in different directions to find water for their animals. Obadiah was met by Elijah, who asked him to tell Ahab that he wanted to see him. Obadiah thought that this could cause his death, if Elijah failed to meet with Ahab. After assurance from Elijah, Obadiah told Ahab. By obeying Elijah, Obadiah was also obeying God.

Have you ever felt that God has asked you to do something that could put your life in danger? When God calls a person to serve him, he provides the tools needed for the task. Whether we are called to work in our own community or on the other side of the world, God will equip us to be a faithful servant.

Prayer: Lord, make me a faithful servant. Amen.

Prayer Concern: Those who are willing to give their life in God’s service

Tuesday December 13, 2011

2 Kings 2:9-22

Inherited Spirit

“Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit.” (v.9)

Elijah knew that he was about to be taken away. He also knew that Elisha would be his successor. When Elisha asked for a double share of Elijah spirit, Elijah knew that it was up to God to grant this request. That is why he said that if Elisha saw him being taken from him that it would be granted, otherwise it would not be granted. When Elijah was taken up in a whirlwind into heaven, his mantle fell to Elisha. Elisha was able to part the Jordan River with the mantle, and the prophets declared, "The spirit of Elijah rest on Elisha." Not knowing what happened to Elijah, they insisted on sending men to look for him. Elisha did not want them to go, and told them when they returned what he had said. Elisha was able to purify the spring of water near Jericho the spirit that rested on Elisha was the Spirit of God.

The same Spirit of God has been freely given to people throughout history. Jesus predicted that his followers would do greater things than he did. We have received the Spirit of God in Jesus Christ which empowers us to do great things for him.

Prayer: Let us inherit a share of your spirit, so that we can share your love with the world.
Amen.

Prayer Concern: The poor in Spirit

Wednesday December 14, 2011

Malachi 3:16-4:6

Parents and Children

"He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse." (v. 4:6)

This book of the Old Testament is the last prophecy written before the coming of Christ. The prophecy is that Elijah will return before the great and terrible day of the Lord. Jesus interprets this prophecy following the Transfiguration. "Elijah is indeed coming and will restore all things; but I tell you that Elijah has already come." (Matthew 17: 11-12) (This was a reference to John the Baptist). The fourth commandment is honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God is giving you. (Exodus 20:12).

I was a social worker with the juvenile justice system for forty years. I know that many youth do not honor their parents, but I also know that there are parents who are not "worthy" of honor. When relationships between parents and children have gone wrong, grace still abounds. As it is stated in our key verse: "He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents,"

Prayer: Heal the hurts which children and parents cause each other. Amen.

Prayer Concern: Dysfunctional families.

Thursday December 15, 2011

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

An Everlasting Throne

“Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me, your throne shall be established forever. “(v.16)

David was living in a house made of cedar. He was reassured by the prophet Nathan that the Lord was with him. However David was not the person who would build a physical house for God (The Temple). (David’s son, Solomon, would build the temple.)

David was called from being a shepherd of sheep to being a prince over God’s people, Israel. The house that David was going to build was to be a family of kings, a descendant of whom would be Jesus, the Messiah. The complete list of descendants from David to Jesus is recorded in Matthew. We are all part of this everlasting kingdom that was promised to David. Christ has shown us how we should live as a part of his kingdom. We need to show Christ’s love and forgiveness, starting with our own household, and reaching to the ends of the earth.

In a few days we will be celebrating the birth of Jesus, What a great opportunity to share God’s Kingdom with the world.

Prayer: Come to us Lord Jesus and help us to share your love and forgiveness with the whole world. Amen.

Prayer Concern: A world needing Christ’s love

George Bowden is retired from 40 years as a Social Worker with the State of Maryland Department of Juvenile Services. He has a BA and MSW from the University of Maryland. He was born with Cerebral Palsy, but was able to overcome most challenges. His wife Judy is a Physical Therapist. Married for 39 years., the Bowdens are members of St. Stephen Lutheran Church in Baltimore, (Arbutus) Maryland.

Friendships

A Precious Friend

I was privileged to know and be Walter's sponsor and medical guardian for 17 years. Most of all I was privileged to be his friend. He was placed in the Rosewood Center when he was five. I met him when he was in his 30's. He lived to the age of 54.

Walter had (according to tests used at the time) profound intellectual disabilities and Down Syndrome. I prefer to think of my friend as one who was a child of God, who had a wonderful, caring heart and a precious sense of humor. My dear friend Walter taught me about many things including trust, love and the strength of foundational faith. Walter taught me about honor and respect for all people and how to meet people where they are.

Growing up in an institution, Walter learned quickly to guard his food and himself. It was a reality of life that if you were not strong and vigilant someone would take your food and take advantage of you. I learned through time that Walter had learned to laugh and smile when he was afraid. It, unfortunately, was sometimes a defense mechanism. It took a good amount of time to help Walter learn to share in an environment that was safe.

As Walter began to share and develop a trust, I was humbled as I came to know what his life was like in the institution. To trust me was an awesome trust. He was able to learn how to give me a piece of his cookie and allowed me to share with him. He learned a little at a time that I would not steal from him. He taught me about building trust, how hard that can be and the sacredness of that trust.

Walter was one of two people who were in tune with me and although I never shared when I was not having the best day, he intuitively knew. Walter would put his arms around me, pat me on the back, rock me and say "It's alright."

Walter was essentially non-verbal when I met him. I believe this was because he did not feel comfortable or able to make his wishes known. Maybe he just wasn't encouraged. Although over time, using pictures, verbal, and signed communication, Walter began using words. As a matter of fact Walter began to come in everyday with a new word. One of his first was "Amen" (pronounced AH-Main) I thought it was because Walter was not able to pronounce his words well.

When I realized that Walter was born into a Jewish family and after I attended a service at the synagogue, I came to realize that worship had been an important part of his family life and even though he was a little one when he was institutionalized his experience with church was powerful and foundational. His "Amen" had longstanding history. I have found this as well with people who are close to end of life and who have dementia. The prayers and hymns that are a part of people's lives when they are very young stay with them and are a source of hope and peace in transitional times. "Gonna go to church, gonna pray, Amen." My friend Walter taught me much about Faith.

One morning he came into work, grabbed my hand and ran into the hall; he pointed out the window laughing excitedly and said, "It's raining, it's raining, go out in the rain." Walter was learning how to express himself. It was fun to walk with him as he discovered language. Walter moved from Rosewood to a smaller institution in Western Maryland when he was in his 40's, he lived there for a few years and then he lived in group homes and in a nursing facility.

During the last years of his life, Walter taught me that friendship transcends death. When Walter died I was able to participate and preach at his funeral. My little daughter was just five at the time. Walter loved her deeply and called her his baby. She was able to learn that death is not a frightening thing but a part of our lives. She talked to Walter; she touched him and asked questions about death and dying. At the cemetery she found flowers for his grave, sprinkled earth on his casket and said goodbye, friend Walter.

Walter is buried in a beautiful spot in West Virginia overlooking the mountains. I wanted him to be free of his disability and all the pain he experienced in his life. There is freedom in death and in the beautiful place where he rests.

There are many moments and memories of my dear friend. I hope that these words give you a sense of how precious his life and friendship have been and will continue to be to me. My life would be less without Walter. Thank you dear friend! I certainly do miss you!

Jimmy

Whom I believe was part fish

I met Jimmy in 1979. We worked together at the ARC. He and I were friends for a number of years. I trained Jimmy for the Special Olympics, in swimming (hence the fish reference) on four different occasions. Jim was born blind and had intellectual disabilities, but these things didn't stop him from swimming across an Olympic size pool with joyful ability!

Jimmy taught me that if you give someone a chance, believe in them, share their enthusiasm, get excited with them and give them a challenge they can accomplish amazing things!

Jim was certainly an amazing man. His parents loved him very much and were always involved in his care. I am not sure what age he was when he went to live at Rosewood Center. I met him when he was in his late 20's. In my time with Jimmy he learned to talk in complete sentences, won one gold, two silver and one bronze medal. Oh the things we can do when given the opportunity!

We began our training a few months ahead of time at whichever YMCA the Olympics were held that year. Jim always used the lane by the wall of the pool so he could follow and trail the wall. It helped him to stay on course. I am so thankful for his friendship! I am sad that we have lost touch over the years, but the friendship we shared and the wonderful gifts he gave me are things that will stay with me. Jim also taught me that the people who accompany us and support us in the journey are what keep on course and these same people help to make us who we are. Thank you Jim!